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SUBJECT: COUNTERTERRORISM IN FRANCE: PKK, LTTE, ETA,
TERRORISM FINANCING

REF: PARIS 3340

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT FOR REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (S//NF) SUMMARY: Poloff met on August 7 with Louis Blin, the MFA's Acting DAS-equivalent for security and counterterrorism in the Bureau of Strategic Affairs, to discuss current U.S./France counterterrorism cases. Blin expressed disappointment (but not surprise) at Vienna's release and assisted escape of PKK terrorist Riza Altun, who remains under indictment in France. French intelligence services, he said, had unconfirmed reports that Altun was assassinated after arriving in Irbil, and theorized that his "escape" may have been planned by his own Kurdish enemies. Blin agreed that the Vienna-Irbil commercial flight is worrying, and said he thought France would be open to working with the U.S. on pushing Austria to make a more serious effort in preventing the use of the flight by terrorists and common criminals. Austria, Blin judged, is becoming a safe haven in Europe.

12. (S//NF) SUMMARY CONTINUED: The French judicial case against the LTTE, Blin said, is active, and authorities hope to bring the suspects to trial "soon." Blin noted that the GOF had feared LTTE retaliation for the French operation, but judged the effort as necessary. ETA is not targeting France, Blin said, but French counterterrorism police are working hard to prevent France from being used as a base of operations. Portugal, he added, appears to be the "new" preferred logistics hub. The French-equivalent of U.S. E.O. 13224, Blin explained, is now in force, but remained a list with no designees. Revitalization of the UN's CTED committee was also discussed and reported reftel. END SUMMARY

PKK

13. (S//NF) The GOF is very concerned (and angry) about Austria's release and assisted escape of PKK terrorist, Riza Altun, who remains under indictment in France, Blin explained. The GOF demarched in Vienna, but did not press Austria intensely because of France's own failures in the

case. French police, he explained, had failed to notify the judiciary when Riza Altun did not make his weekly report at the station (as mandated by his judicial control status). As a result, Austrian authorities claimed they did not know of Altun's indictment, though Blin refuted this as nonsense, noting that a Schengen file on Altun clearly identified his indictment status in France. Either Austrian authorities ignored the information, or had not followed standard procedures. While Vienna's explanation was not sufficient, France still did not plan to pursue the issue any further with Austrian authorities. That said, the incident would certainly affect the atmospherics of bilateral judicial and police cooperation.

¶4. (S//NF) Poloff raised U.S. concerns about the commercial Vienna/Irbil flight. Blin agreed that the flight could be used by terrorists or even criminals in fleeing to and/or from Europe. He was open to working with the U.S. on pushing the Austrians to further enforce appropriate security measures. Austrian authorities, Blin said, did not feel threatened by terrorism, and by accommodating terrorists like Altun, they thought they could avoid becoming a target. Austria, he opined, was becoming a safe haven.

¶5. (S//NF) French intelligence services, Blin told us, had unconfirmed reports that Riza Altun was assassinated after arriving in Irbil. Officials theorized that Altun had been set up by his Kurdish enemies. It was clear, Blin said, that Austrian authorities had been tipped off about Altun. The tip off could have easily come from one of Altun's adversaries who knew Austrian officials would most likely send him back to Northern Iraq where his enemies in the PKK could assassinate him. Blin welcomed any U.S. information on the suspected assassination plot. He added that, if true,

the GOF would be less concerned about the possibility that other PKK indictees would attempt to flee France. For the moment, authorities had stepped up surveillance on the other indictees.

EXTRADITION TO TURKEY

¶5. (S//NF) An interministerial meeting would soon be deciding on the principle of extradition to Turkey, Blin said. With the death penalty no longer in force and a Turkish effort underway to guarantee better treatment of PKK detainees, Blin noted that the GOF would likely decide that, in principle at least, extradition to Turkey was possible. The MFA was strongly supportive of extradition, hoping that such a move might help improve relations with Turkey. All cases would still be considered individually, but the barrier to the extradition option would now be lifted. Blin noted that the Interior Ministry remained opposed to extradition for fear of reprisals on French territory by the PKK. Even so, he added, the measure would likely be approved in September.

LTTE

¶6. (S//NF) The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Blin said, is one of the most sophisticated and well managed terrorist groups currently in existence. With its own naval and air forces, he mused, the group was also among the most dangerous localized insurgencies, with a great deal of financial and political support from its members around the world -- as well as very little international opposition. Blin noted that despite some reluctance among Interior Ministry officials to act for fear of reprisals, the April 2007 French raid which crippled the LTTE France branch had been extremely successful. While authorities believe that the LTTE continues some operations in France, the crackdown had essentially dismantled the organization. In addition, Blin said, French authorities had taken steps to stop LTTE's television station from broadcasting their television station from France. Blin could not recall definitively, but thought LTTE had moved on to broadcasting from Denmark. The localized threat from the LTTE, and Sri Lankan government

methods for dealing with the problem, Blin noted, had made the group a low priority for most governments, but he wondered if al-Qaida and others were benefiting from LTTE's experience. Kamikaze style attacks started with the LTTE, he said, but certainly did not end there.

ETA

¶7. (S//NF) Blin explained that although ETA was not targeting France, counterterrorism officials worked closely with Spanish police and remained vigilant about ETA logistical operations in the south. Several arrests had been made in the past year, he noted, along with the discovery and seizure of a number of arms caches. As a result, he said, ETA had begun to base more of its logistical operations from Portugal where it had found a more hospitable environment.

TERRORISM FINANCE

¶8. (C) Four months ago the GOF established a French "list" similar to that of U.S. E.O. 13224, Blin explained. The list, which was approved in the January 2006 French C/T legislation, only exists in theory for the moment, as it contains no entries. But once an organization is listed, it could have all assets located in France seized. An interministerial committee would convene soon, he said, to discuss groups that could be sanctioned, targeting those who are not currently covered by the European C/T list. The intelligence services, Blin noted, had not been particularly helpful because they saw the measure as essentially political in nature, but had agreed in principle to the idea. Corsican

terrorist groups were likely to be the first targets, he speculated, but added that the GOF could theoretically place any group the list. Blin explained that the legislation had been written to allow French authorities a great deal of discretion as to which groups qualified for listing.

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